

this policy and therefore do not believe further adjustments are required at this time.

I assure you of my Administration's commitment to the successful implementation of this policy.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Daniel K. Inouye, chairman, and W. Thad Cochran, vice chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Carl Levin, chairman, and John S. McCain III, ranking member, Senate Committee

on Armed Services; John F. Kerry, chairman, and Richard G. Lugar, ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; David R. Obey, chairman, and Jerry Lewis, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations; Isaac N. Ike Skelton IV, chairman, and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, ranking member, House Committee on Armed Services; and Howard L. Berman, chairman, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, ranking member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 19.

Remarks at a Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session in Henderson, Nevada February 19, 2010

The President. Hey, how's it going, Henderson! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much, everybody. Everybody, have a seat, have a seat. I am thrilled to be here.

Audience member. We love you, Mr. President!

The President. I love you back.

We've got some special guests here. Everybody's a special guest, but I just want to acknowledge a few folks here: Secretary of State Ross Miller in the house; two outstanding Members of Congress, Representative Shelley Berkley and your own Dina Titus; Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford. We've got State Assembly Majority Leader John Ocuera, Clark County Commissioner chairman Rory Reid, Henderson Mayor Andy Hafen, former Governor Bob Miller.

We've got—first, can everybody give a huge round of applause for Tina Long for the great introduction of Harry Reid? Green Valley High School principal Jeff Horn—[*applause*—there we go. Pump it up! That's good. Obviously not exam time yet. [*Laughter*] Get's a standing "O." [*Laughter*] The Green Valley High School Marching Band that played at my Inauguration—give them a big round of applause. They played "Viva Las Vegas"—[*laughter*]—at the reviewing stand. They did. [*Laughter*] And finally—he may have already been acknowledged—I want to

give a special acknowledgment to Greg Koehler, North Las Vegas Fire Department, who just returned from 14 days in Haiti giving medical assistance to orphans injured in the quake. Thank you. We're proud of you. Thank you.

Now, it's good to be back in Nevada, good to be back in Vegas, good to be back in Henderson, and good to be with my good friend, your great Senator, Harry Reid. Now, I understand Henderson is where Harry went to school as a boy and fought in the ring as an amateur boxer. Now, looking at Harry, you wouldn't say that—[*laughter*]—I mean, let's face it—[*laughter*]—but I can personally attest that Harry Reid is one of the toughest people I know. He does not give up. He knows what he cares about. He knows what he believes in, and he's willing to fight for it. And sometimes he takes his licks, but he gets back up. Harry Reid has never stopped fighting. He hasn't stopped fighting for Henderson; he hasn't stopped fighting for Nevada; he has not stopped fighting for the United States of America and middle class families all across this country that need a fair shake.

Now, I'm looking forward to hearing what's on your minds and trying to answer a few questions. But before I do, let me say a few words about the situation that folks are facing right now.

Harry is not one for sugarcoating things; I don't know if you noticed that. He's kind of a blunt guy. *[Laughter]* Neither am I. These are tough times. When President Kennedy was here, he called Henderson a "city of destiny" because he saw its potential as Las Vegas grew. But for too long, I know many of you have felt like your destiny's been slipping beyond your control.

You don't need me to tell you that. All of you in some way have felt this recession. You felt it in the tourism and hospitality industry. You felt it in the construction industry. The unemployment rate here is 13 percent, which is the second highest in the Nation. Foreclosures are also among the highest. Home values have fallen by more than almost anyplace else. And this is after a decade when, for most middle class families, incomes actually shrank and wages flat-lined, and the only thing rising faster was medical costs and the cost of education.

So I know it's tough out there. Harry Reid knows it's tough out there. That's why we asked you to send us to Washington. We didn't run for the fancy title or a big desk or a comfy chair. We didn't run because it was fun to get your name in the newspapers—most of the time, it's not. *[Laughter]* Right? We didn't run so a bunch of folks on cable TV could chatter about you. *[Laughter]* And we didn't run to kick our problems down the road. We ran to solve problems that folks like you are facing every single day. That's why we ran for office. That's why Harry wanted to be majority leader and that's why I wanted to be President of the United States, to help you.

Now, when my administration took office, our immediate mission was clear: We needed to stop the great recession from turning into a great depression. And economists of every stripe were warning that was a real possibility. And that meant that we had to make some decisions swiftly, boldly, and not always popular, but decisions that were necessary. It wasn't a time for satisfying the politics of the moment. It wasn't time for just playing to the cameras. It was time for doing what was right.

That's why we helped stabilize our financial system, not because we felt any compassion for big banks, but because not doing so would have

endangered the savings and dreams of millions more Americans. And by the way, I was committed to ensuring that if taxpayers were going to provide temporary assistance to keep our financial system afloat, then it actually had to be temporary. And I was determined to get back every single dime, and we are well on our way to doing that, getting back every single dime from those banks.

In fact, one battle we're having right now is, we think the largest banks should be assessed a fee so that taxpayers are held harmless for the assistance that you've been giving. As you might imagine, the banks are not enthusiastic about that. *[Laughter]* And it won't surprise you to learn that they've got a few friends in Congress who are willing to go along, but you know Harry Reid's not one of those folks who are willing to go along. We're going to get your money back because Harry Reid's going to make sure you get your money back.

We helped shore up the American auto industry. That wasn't popular. I understood why. Folks felt like these companies should reap the consequences of bad management decisions in the past, just like any other company would. But if we had let GM and Chrysler go under, it would have been hundreds of thousands of hard-working Americans who paid the price, not just folks at those companies themselves, but at suppliers and dealers all across the country.

So we told them, if you're willing to take the tough and painful steps you make that are needed for you to become more competitive, then we're willing to invest in your future. And as a result, auto production in the United States of America is up 69 percent from the first 3 months of 2009. GM's CEO recently said that the company would repay \$6.7 billion in loans from taxpayers, with interest, by June of this year.

Now, one of the things you need to know is that the steps we've taken to shore up the banks and the autos, they have nothing to do with the Recovery Act. Those were separate. We had to do those as emergency measures. And I just want to point this out: Harry Reid, he's got his pollsters; I've got my pollsters. We knew that

this wasn't going to be popular. But we did it because it was the right thing to do.

So it's also why we passed the Recovery Act. Now, a lot of people think that the stimulus package, the Recovery Act—if you listen on television, you'd think, well, that's all about giving banks money. That has nothing to do with the banks. The other week, I saw a poll that said Americans, they don't like the Recovery Act; they just like all the individual parts of the Recovery Act. [*Laughter*]

And the reason is, they think the Recovery Act is for banks and auto companies. When you ask folks about what was actually in the Recovery Act, they think it's full of good ideas, like tax cuts, like infrastructure investment, like unemployment relief. That's what the Recovery Act was. It was tax cuts for small-business owners and 95 percent of you. You may not have noticed, 95 percent of you got a tax cut because of Harry Reid and because of the Recovery Act, one million people in the State of Nevada.

We expanded unemployment insurance at a time when it was absolutely vital for people as they were trying to stay afloat, more than a quarter million of your members—of your neighbors. It was jobs for construction workers and jobs for cops and firemen, jobs for almost 2,000 education professionals right here in Nevada.

I haven't talked to the principal, but I guarantee you, we would have seen some very difficult decisions having to be made about maintaining teachers right here at Green Valley if it hadn't been for the help that Harry Reid provided last year. You would have seen some very tough choices.

All of this—from the tax cuts to the unemployment insurance to the jobs—that was only possible because of Harry's leadership. And as a result, our economy is growing again. Almost 2 million Americans who'd otherwise be employed [unemployed]^{*} are working right now because of what Harry Reid did. We're no longer staring into an economic abyss because of what Harry Reid helped to do.

Now, he and I both know that's little comfort to the 7 million Americans who lost their job in this recession. It's little comfort to homeowners who are facing foreclosure or steep declines in their home values, or to students who are having to delay their college plans because they can't afford it, or older folks who are postponing retirement.

That's why I'm not going to rest. That's not—why we're not done. That's why Harry Reid isn't going to rest until all of America's working again, until the dream of home ownership is secure once again, and until our economy is benefiting not just Wall Street, but benefiting hard-working Nevada families, benefiting the middle class, benefiting Americans all across this great country of ours. That's what we are aiming to do.

Now, I've said before that the way I measure our economy's strength—the way you measure it—is by whether jobs and wages and incomes are growing. But the other way we measure it is by whether families have a roof over their heads and whether folks are living out that American Dream of owning a home. That dream's been jeopardized in this recession for a lot of people, especially right here in Nevada.

Now, part of it was—I've got to be blunt here, I got to be honest—part of it was because too many lenders were focused on making a quick buck instead of acting responsibly. All right? And, if we're honest, too many borrowers acted irresponsibly at certain points, taking on mortgages that they knew they couldn't afford. And what happened was the regulators in Washington and legislators too often turned a blind eye to the excesses and the failures on Wall Street that fed a housing bubble. And now that that bubble's burst, it's left devastation that we're still grappling with today.

Now, Government has a responsibility to help deal with this problem. Government can't solve this problem alone. We got to be honest about that. Government alone can't solve this problem, and it shouldn't. But Government can make a difference. It can't stop every fore-

^{*} White House correction.

closure, and tax dollars shouldn't be used to reward the very irresponsible lenders and borrowers who helped bring about the housing crisis. But what we can do is help families who've done everything right stay in their homes whenever possible. What we can do is stabilize the housing market so that home values can begin rising again.

And that's why we're buying up vacant homes and converting them into affordable housing, creating jobs, stemming our housing crisis, growing the local economy. That's why last year we put a tax credit worth thousands of dollars into the pocket of 1.4 million Americans to help them buy their first home: first-time home buyers credit. That's why we're offering over 1 million struggling homeowners lower monthly payments through our loan modification initiative.

And that's why today, thanks to the leadership of Harry Reid, I'm announcing a \$1.5 billion fund for housing finance agencies in the States that are hardest hit by this housing crisis, and that means here in Nevada. Right here in Nevada.

So this fund's going to help out-of-work homeowners avoid preventable foreclosures. It will help homeowners who owe more than their homes are worth find a way to pay their mortgages that works for both the borrowers and the lenders alike, and will help folks who've taken out a second mortgage modify their loans.

So yes, we need to strengthen our housing market. And we need to focus on job creation and getting our economy moving again. But one last thing I want to be clear about: We can do all those things, dealing with, sort of, the emergency crisis, and still fall behind in the 21st century, in this global economy, unless we recommit ourselves to solving some of the long-term problems that have been with us for years.

We've got to recognize, just like earlier generations, that our future is what we make of it, and unless we give everything we've got to securing America's success in the 21st century, our children aren't going to have the same opportunities.

Now, I've traveled a lot over the last year, all over the world, and I've got to tell you, countries like China, they're competing to win. And

there's nothing wrong with that. We want China to succeed. They've got a lot of poverty, much more poverty than we have here, and it's good for their stability if they're doing well. But I don't know about you, I don't intend to cede the 21st century to anybody else. America's not a nation that follows; America leads. That's what I intend for us to do once again. America leads.

So what does it mean to lead? It means countries that outeducate us today are going to outcompete us tomorrow. And that means America has to lead in education. And that's why we're working with educators to transform our schools and make college more affordable and prepare our kids for science and engineering and technical degrees, because those are going to be the jobs of the future.

And because the future belongs to countries that create the jobs of tomorrow, we've got to lead in energy. That's why we're investing in companies right here in Nevada and across this Nation to produce solar power and wind power and the smart, energy-efficient electric grids and investments that are giving rise to a clean energy economy. It's vital that we do that.

Our Nation can't lead, we can't prosper, if we've got a broken-down health care system that works better for the insurance companies than it does for ordinary Americans. And we can't squander the opportunity to reform our health care system to make it work for everybody.

That's why this coming week, I'm going to be meeting and Harry is going to be meeting with members of both parties and both Chambers. We're going to move forward the Democratic proposal. We hope the Republicans have one too. And we'll sit down, and let's hammer it out, go—we'll go section by section.

Because America can't solve our economic problems until—unless we tackle some of these structural problems, and America can't lead, we can't succeed unless we're also getting a handle on our debt. We've got to confront this fiscal crisis that has been brewing for years. That's why we're cutting what we don't need to pay for what we do. That's why I signed a law that says Americans should pay as we go and live within our means. That's why yesterday I announced a

bipartisan fiscal commission that will help us meet our fiscal challenges once and for all.

Fiscal responsibility, clean energy, a world-class education, a health care system that works, an economy that lifts up all our citizens, that's how America can lead. That's how the future will be won, with all of us coming together to win it, Democrats and Republicans alike, and Independents.

With all the petty partisanship and game-playing in Washington, I know sometimes you guys can feel pretty frustrated.

Audience members. Yes!

The President. I know it can be easy to despair about whether we, as a nation, can come together anymore. But for those who wonder if America can unite, just come to Henderson. You think about it. This is a town that was founded during World War II to supply metal for planes, for guns, for the arsenal of democracy that freed the world from tyranny. This is a town—it wasn't built by liberals or conservatives; it was built by Americans, by patriots who rallied around a common purpose in an hour of need. And I'm certain that if we can reclaim in this country the spirit of unity that built Henderson, Nevada, all those years ago, then we can build cities of destiny across this country, and the future will belong to the United States of America.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

All right, everybody sit down. This is the—here's where I'm on the hot seat, so I've got to take off my jacket—[laughter]—answer some questions. Everybody sit down. All right.

Some of you've been to town halls before, so this is pretty straightforward. We've got people in the audience with mikes, and just raise your hand. We're going to go girl, boy, girl, boy—[laughter]—make sure it's fair. And I'm going to try to take as many questions as I can in the time remaining. And when you—before you answer [ask] your question, if you can introduce yourself so that we know who you are, and try to make your question relatively brief so that we can get in as many as possible. All right?

All right, as I said, we're going to go girl, boy, girl, boy. Young lady right there, yes.

Community Health Clinics/Health Insurance Reform

Q. Thank you, President Obama. In Nevada, we have the second—

The President. What's your name?

Q. Oh, my name is Florence Jameson.

The President. Okay. How are you, Florence?

Q. I'm terrific.

The President. Great.

Q. In Nevada, we have the second highest number of medically uninsured, about 325,000 uninsured. More than five working adults are colleagues who are dying each week because of no access to health care. I am the founder of Volunteers in Medicine—Southern Nevada, a free clinic which has been set up to help our sick and dying. There are hundreds of caring Nevadans that have rallied like a corps of angels to come and provide free health care for their struggling neighbors: housekeepers, operators, receptionists, eligibility workers, social workers, nurses, doctors.

In your health reform bill, you have a provision to protect the federally funded subsidized community clinics. It is not clear if they're going to cover the free clinics where volunteers throughout the community have rallied to give support to their struggling neighbors in their great time of need. Can you help us with that?

The President. Well, thank you, first of all, for the great work that you guys are doing. So we appreciate that. But if you're like a lot of free clinics across the country, I know you're getting overwhelmed, because the need is so great.

The bill that Harry and I have been working on would provide assistance to a whole range of community-based efforts—preventive care, wellness care—which is absolutely vital, not only for the people who are receiving services at clinics like yours, but also for reducing the costs of health care overall, because the more that people have access to preventive care, the

* White House correction.

less likely they are to go to the emergency room when things are already out of hand.

Now, let me just speak more broadly about health care, because we're going to have a meeting with the Republicans, as I said, next week. I've got to admit that this has been an issue that I was warned I shouldn't take on. [Laughter] No, no, I mean, seriously, when I first came in—and Harry was part of some of these conversations—there were a lot of political advisers who said: “Look, health care is just too hard, it's just too complicated. Everybody says in theory that they want to reform the health care system, but because it's complicated, once you start putting a bill together, you get all kinds of criticism. The insurance lobby will spend millions of dollars on advertising and TV, scaring the heck out of everybody. Your poll numbers will go down. And you're not going to get a lot of cooperation from the other side.”

I mean, that was the warning. Plus, because the economy's bad, a lot of people are already feeling kind of anxious, and so they're thinking: “Gosh, we had to do all that stuff to fix the financial system. We had to do this stuff to fix the autos. We had this big recovery package. The deficits are going up, partly because tax revenue's not coming in, and we're having to spend more on unemployment insurance and things like that. This is probably not the time to be too ambitious.”

So I want to explain to everybody why I decided to take it on. First of all, I decided to take it on because I get a letter or two or five every day from people who have lost their job and suddenly they don't have health insurance, somebody in their family gets sick, and they lose their house. They were solid middle class folks until they lost their job, and lo and behold, they discovered they couldn't get coverage because something had happened to them before. Maybe a woman had had breast cancer, and it was okay as long as she had her employer-based health care. But once she tried—once she lost her job and tried to get health care, couldn't get it.

I've looked too many parents in the eye who say, “Our children have these chronic diseases, and we found out that our insurance only cov-

ered us up to a certain amount”—and then they hit a cap—“and afterwards, we had to hold bake sales and our neighbors had to raise money just to make sure that our kids would live.” Too many stories like that. So that was the main reason that I said we had to take it on.

But the second reason was because even if you've got health insurance, what's happened to your premiums lately? Look, if this is a representative sample, I'm assuming that 85 percent of you right now have health care—maybe 90 percent—let's say 85 percent of you have health care. Some of you are getting it through your jobs; some of you are still buying it individually, or you're a small-business owner and you're purchasing it. No matter what your situation, I guarantee you your costs have gone up at least double digits over the last year. They have doubled over the last decade. And they're going to more than double over the next decade if we don't do anything. So even if you're lucky enough to have health care, it is digging deeper and deeper into your pocket.

They just had—some of you saw the news—for people who don't have insurance through a big employer, the individual market, in California, one of the biggest insurance providers, Anthem BlueCross, just announced that they were going to raise rates on these folks by up to 39 percent—up to 39 percent.

That's the future. That's the future, Henderson. That's going to be one of the main things that helps to bankrupt local school districts, because all these teachers, all these employees, those health care costs go up. Universities—those young people who are about to go to college, the—part of the reason your tuition is going up is because every employee at the university, their health care costs are going up. And that gets passed on to you.

And finally, the third reason that I—we had to take this on is because the deficit and the debt that you hear everybody getting in a tizzy about—properly so—the vast majority of our long-term debt is driven by Medicare and Medicaid. It's driven by our rising health care costs. Nothing comes close. You could eliminate every earmark, you could eliminate foreign aid, you could eliminate all that stuff, it would amount to

about 5 percent of the budget. Most of it is health care costs.

And as the population gets older, they use more health care; that drives it up even faster. And pretty soon, the entire Federal budget is going to be gobbled up by these rising health care costs. And you're already seeing it at the State level here in Nevada, right? What's happening with Medicaid? The Governor is starting to talk about having to cut all kinds of aspects of Medicaid because of the cost.

So here's my point: We can't wait to reform the health care system. It is vital for our economy. It is vital for our economy to change how health care works in this country. It's vital.

Now, having said all that, the people who were giving me advice at the beginning of the year were right, health care has been knocking me around pretty good. [*Laughter*] It's been knocking Harry around pretty good. And Harry has shown extraordinary courage because he said, "You know what, Barack, we are going to get this done. I know it's costing me politically, but it's important; it's the right thing to do." That's what he's been saying consistently, and I'm proud of him for it.

So let me—just very quickly, let me describe what it is that we have proposed—and I'm waiting to see what the Republicans propose in turn—because there's been a lot of misinformation here. What we have said is this: If you have health insurance, we are going to pass a series of health reforms so that the insurance companies have to treat you fairly—it's very straightforward—that they can't prevent you from getting health insurance because of a preexisting condition; that they can't put a lifetime cap so in the fine print it turns out that you're not fully covered. So there are a whole series of insurance reforms. That's number one.

Number two, we've got a whole series of cost controls. So what we're saying is, for example, that every insurer, they've got to spend the vast majority of your premiums on actual care, as opposed to profits and overhead. We're saying that we've got to get out some of the waste and abuse, including subsidies to insurance companies in the Medicare system that run in the tens of billions of dollars every

year. That's not a good use of your taxpayer dollars. And we're working to improve wellness and prevention, as I said before, so that people aren't going to the emergency room for care.

Now, the third thing, and the thing that's most controversial, sadly, is what we're also saying is we've got to make sure that everybody can have access to coverage. And the way we do that is we set up something called an exchange where, essentially, individuals and small businesses who aren't getting a good deal because they don't have the same negotiating power as the big companies when it comes to the insurance market, they can pool just like Members of Congress and Federal employees do in their health care plan. They can pool so that now they've got the purchasing power of a million people behind them, and they can get a better deal. That can lower their costs. And we'll give subsidies for working families who can't afford it even with lower premium costs.

Now—so I want everybody—pay attention next Thursday when we have this health care summit. You may not want to watch all 6 or 8 hours of it; you got things to do. [*Laughter*] But pay attention to what this debate is about, because there's been so much talk about death panels and adding to the deficit, and this and that and the other. Pay attention, because this is—what we're proposing is—has nothing to do with a Government takeover of your health care. Most of you would have the exact same health care that you've got right now, but you'd be more protected and more secure. And if you don't have health care, you'd have a chance of getting health care.

And by the way, it would actually save us money in the long term, because all those wasteful dollars that we're spending right now, the experts estimate we'd actually save a trillion dollars by passing it.

Now, I think it's the right thing to do. The Republicans say that they've got a better way of doing it, so I want them to put it on the table, because as I told them a while back, look, I mean, I'm not a—I'm not an unreasonable guy. [*Laughter*] If you show me that you can do the things we just talked about—protect

people from insurance problems, make sure that the costs are controlled, and people who don't have health insurance are covered—and you can do it cheaper than me, then why wouldn't I do that? I'll just grab your idea and say, great, and take all the credit. [Laughter] I'd be happy to do it.

So show me what you got. But don't let the American people go another year, another 10 years, another 20 years without health insurance reform in this country.

All right. Okay, it's a gentleman's turn. It's a man's turn. This guy over here. This guy with a beard.

Oral Health and Vision Care as Part of Health Care Reform

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Ben Burris, from Jonesboro, Arkansas.

The President. What are you doing all the way here in Vegas?

Q. Everybody comes to Vegas. [Laughter]

The President. That's what I'm talking about. There you go. Everybody comes to Vegas. Yes. Now, here's my only question, Ben. Have you spent some money here in Vegas?

Q. Oh, yes, sir.

The President. Oh, he says, "Yes, sir."

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. He's spending some money here in Vegas. All right. That's good. We like to see that. All right, what's your question?

Q. Well, sir, I'm reasonably familiar with the current and proposed legislature as it applies to dentistry and oral health.

The President. Yes.

Q. And my question is, what's your vision for how dentistry will fit into your larger framework for health care reform?

The President. Well, I—are you a dentist yourself?

Q. Yes, sir. So if somebody has a heart attack, you better still call 9-1-1. [Laughter] Just a dentist.

The President. The—now, it is interesting that you raised this. It turns out—this is serious—that dental hygiene is actually very important for keeping your heart healthy.

Q. Absolutely.

The President. It turns out that heart disease can be triggered when you've got gum disease. So everybody floss. That's my first—[laughter]—am I right? You got to floss.

It is my hope that we can include dental care in the various proposals that we're putting forward. Dental and vision care are very important. Now, I'll tell you that some folks will say we can't afford it. Some States in their Medicaid program cover dental; some States don't.

At minimum, I think it's very important that we've got dental care for our kids. Because what happens is, is that if we can keep our children's teeth healthy, then usually that means that they've got healthy teeth as adults. And if not, oftentimes that actually distracts them and prevents them from learning, because both dental and eye care—a lot of kids end up being distracted. They can't read the blackboard; they've got a cavity that's been untreated. It's a huge problem.

So I would like to see dental care covered. I will tell you that some folks are going to say we can't afford it. At minimum, I'd like to see that our children have the care that they need. All right?

Q. Can I say one more thing, sir? I think most of us in dentistry think that health care is the primary need here in terms of that, and children as well. So we think that if you can take care of health care first and let dentistry—do that kind of thing—could—more important to take care of the health care first.

The President. There you go.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. All right, I appreciate that. Thank you.

Okay, it's a young lady's turn. All right. It's so hard to choose. Okay, I'll call on this young lady back here, right over here. Yes, you. [Laughter] All right, we got to get the young man with the mike over to you.

National Economy/Job Growth

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank God for this opportunity. I realize that insurance and medical care has been a major issue. This is my problem. I worked for United Airlines for nearly 30 years. I was severely injured during flight. I have a workman comp's case that have fallen

on deaf's ear. The conflict in this city with the lawyers and the doctors and this whole problem has drove my life really to almost not having a life at all.

I don't know where else to turn. I don't know who else to talk to about the problem. I've written you letters. I've written letters to many of the Senators here in Las Vegas. I've talked to the doctors. I've done everything I know how to do. But I am a widow with a special needs child. I have lived in the house that I live in for 19 years. My house is in foreclosure. I have disability insurance. I have Social Security disability. That disability tells me, your insurance is not accepted here. I can't get the medical help that I need to get better.

The President. What's your—

Q. I'd love to be a flight attendant for you on that "U.S. One." I'm trained on that "U.S. One." [Laughter]

The President. All right, well, look, the—in terms of your specific issue, come see Harry Reid, and Harry Reid will see if he can help you out here. So—all right? Workman's comp is generally a State issue as opposed to a Federal issue. So—but Harry, he's got a few connections here in Nevada, so I suspect that he can help out.

But look, to the larger point, there are a lot more people who are actually going on disability right now partly because job opportunities have shrunk. And that's why it's so important for us to really focus on jobs.

Now, if you were listening to the Republicans, you'd think that last year we weren't paying any attention to jobs, that we were just kind of—I don't know what we were doing, Harry. I guess we were just sort of sitting around. The truth is, is that everything we did last year was designed around how do we break the back of the recession and move the economic recovery forward in order to promote job growth.

You can't have job growth if the economy is contracting by 6 percent, because businesses look, and they say, "Nobody is spending money, we got no customers, we can't hire." So the first thing we had to do was to make sure that companies were starting to make a profit again and the economy was growing. We are now in

that position because of the work that Harry did and a lot of—and that these two outstanding Members of Congress did, Congresswoman Berkley and Titus. The economy is now growing again.

But here is the challenge that we've got. The challenge we have is that after they've laid off 8 million people, now they're growing with fewer people. So they're making profits, but they haven't started hiring yet. Our challenge is, how do we get businesses to start hiring again?

Now, some of the jobs, I'll be honest with you, are probably not going to come back. And the reason is because people have installed new technologies, or they've set up new systems where they can do more with fewer workers. That's why it's so important for us to invest in new industries and new technologies.

I'll give you an example. We were talking about autos before. Do you know that before the Recovery Act was passed, the United States was producing about 2 percent of the advanced batteries that are used in these clean cars, these electric cars? We were producing 2 percent of the batteries—less than 2 percent. What we did as part of the Recovery Act was invest in developing plants for battery production here in the United States. And do you know that in 18 months, we will have the capacity to produce 20 percent of the advanced batteries around the world? And by 2015, we'll have the capacity to produce 40 percent of the batteries around the world. We've created an entire new industry—an entire new industry has been created here in the United States that can produce jobs.

So we've got to constantly look for those opportunities in solar and in wind and in other high-tech areas, because that's going to be the future. The more people have work available to them—there is just a virtuous cycle that happens. When people go to work, they feel good, their health is better, their kids do better in school, right? Every business—they've got money to spend; they come to Vegas, right? Tourism industry starts taking off.

So we're going to be putting—Harry and I are working now on a jobs package for this year that's designed not—it's no longer de-

signed to grow the economy. Now it's designed to give incentives to businesses who are now making a profit to start hiring again and to help small businesses get loans. Because a lot of small businesses are still having trouble getting loans from banks, even if they see an opportunity for business growth, and we want to make sure that they've got access to capital.

Medicare

All right, it's a guy's turn. All right. I'm going to call on this guy, even though he's got a Cubs jacket on. [Laughter] Everybody knows I'm a White Sox fan, but I'm going to call—just to show that I'm unbiased—

Q. I know you are.

The President. —I'm calling on a Cubs guy. [Laughter]

Q. You're not a Cub hater. I know that.

The President. I'm not a Cub hater, that's right.

Q. Okay, before I ask my question, I want to say something. I'm enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan. I understand that my benefits will be cut with health reform. I'm all for it.

The President. Well, how about that? Let me—before you ask your actual question, let me just make this point. We're not actually eliminating Medicare Advantage. What Medicare Advantage is, is basically, the previous administration had this idea, instead of traditional Medicare, let's contract out to insurance companies to manage the Medicare program. And the insurance companies can then kind of package and pool providers of dental care or eye wear or what have you, and just—it's a one-stop shop for seniors.

Now, in theory that sounds like a pretty good idea, except as you might imagine, if the insurance companies are involved, that means they've got to make a profit. And what happened was they didn't bid out competitively this Medicare Advantage program. So these insurance companies were just getting a sweet deal.

All we've been saying is, let's make sure that there's a competitive bidding process and that we are getting the absolute best bargain.

But I appreciate your larger concern, which is, let's make sure that everybody has access to health care. And traditional Medicare, by the

way, is a great deal. Everybody who is in it is pretty happy with it. But go ahead with your question.

Social Security

Q. I'm going to introduce myself. My name is Norman—[inaudible]. I live in North Las Vegas. I'm retired, and my question is about Social Security.

The President. Now, are you a former Chicagoan?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. Where are you from in Chicago?

Q. Schaumburg last.

The President. Fantastic. Well, the weather is a little bit better here, I got to admit. [Laughter]

Q. Well, we can visit snow here. [Laughter]

The President. Exactly. All right, go ahead.

Q. Well, my question is about Social Security. Now, I know there are a lot of myths out there, and I know you can dispel them. I saw an interview on "Meet the Press" with Alan Greenspan, who, as you know, was on the Social Security Commission in the eighties.

The President. Right.

Q. And Tim Russert asked him specifically, what about the crisis in Social Security? Alan Greenspan's response was, there is no crisis in Social Security; it's a payroll tax issue. Can you comment on that?

The President. Yes. Here's the situation with Social Security. It is actually true that Social Security is not in crisis the way our health care system is in crisis. I mean, when you think about the big entitlement programs, you've got Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid. All right? These are the big programs that take up a huge portion of the Federal budget. Social Security is in the best shape of any of these, because basically, the cost of Social Security will just go up with ordinary inflation, whereas health care costs are going up much faster than inflation.

It is true that if we continue on the current path with Social Security, if we did nothing on Social Security, that at a certain point, in maybe 20 years or so, what would happen is that you start seeing less money coming into the payroll tax, because the population is getting older so

you've got fewer workers, and more people are collecting Social Security so more money is going out, and so the trust fund starts dropping.

And if we did nothing, then somewhere around 2040 what would happen would be a lot of the young people who would start collecting Social Security around then would find that they only got 75 cents on every dollar that they thought they were going to get. Everybody with me so far?

All right. So slowly, we're running out of money. But the fixes that are required for Social Security are not huge, the way they are with Medicare. Medicare, that is a real problem. If we don't get a handle on it, it will bankrupt us. With Social Security, we could make adjustments to the payroll tax.

Q. Yes.

The President. For example, I'll just give you one example. Right now your Social Security—your payroll tax is capped at \$109,000. So what that means is, is that—how many people—I don't mean to pry into your business, but how many people here make less than \$109,000 every year? [Laughter] All right. This is a pretty rich audience; a lot of people kept their hands down. [Laughter] I'm impressed. [Laughter]

No, look, what it means is, basically, for 95 percent of Americans, they pay—every dollar you earn, you pay into the payroll tax. But think about that other 5 percent that's making more than \$109,000 a year. Warren Buffett, he pays the payroll tax on the first \$109,000 he makes, and then for the other 10 billion—[laughter]—he doesn't pay payroll tax.

So—yes, somebody said, "What?" [Laughter] Yes, that's right. That's the way it works.

So what we've said is, well, don't we—doesn't it make sense to maybe have that payroll tax cut off at a higher level, or have people—maybe you hold people harmless till they make \$250,000 a year, but between 250,000 and a million or something, they start paying payroll tax again, just to make sure that the fund overall is solvent.

So that would just be one example. That's not the only way of fixing it, but if you made a slight adjustment like that, then Social Security

would be there well into the future and it would be fine. All right?

Okay. It's a woman's turn. Anybody—I'm going to go back here. Nobody's got—these folks haven't had a chance here. Hold on one second. I'm going to let you use my mike. You'll give it back, right? [Laughter] Okay.

Job Growth/U.S. Tourism Promotion/Airline Industry

Q. My name is Peggy Durfy, and I'm a native Nevadan. I grew up in Boulder City. There's a few of us here—known this great guy Harry all my life. And my question, which is near and dear to my heart, and there's a few of my coworkers watching right now on television and a few here—is we want to know what is going to be done for tourism in Nevada, particularly airlines. I am a U.S. Airways employee who has been furloughed for 17 months. They furloughed over 500 more just on the 14th, so there's many, many of us now on the unemployment rolls. And we want to see what's going to happen to bring our jobs back to Las Vegas.

The President. Well, first of all, obviously, tourism is directly connected to the state of the economy as a whole. If people have disposable income, then they're going to travel. And if they're going to travel and have fun, they're going to come to Las Vegas. Right? So—but on the other hand, if times are tight, they're having trouble paying the bills, making the mortgage, et cetera, that means tourism declines.

So everything we're doing in terms of improving the economy as a whole will start improving tourism. But what is also true is that we can take some particular steps to help to encourage the tourism industry. And Harry, before we came out, was talking about a bipartisan tourism promotion/travel promotion act.

Harry—I'm going to give the mike to Harry for a second. Harry, do you want to talk just a little bit about what would be in the act?

Senator Harry M. Reid. We're going to try to take that up next week. It will save a half a billion dollars over 10 years and create tens of thousands of jobs. We're the only country in the world, major country in the world, that

doesn't promote itself. You'll see on TV Jamaica does, New Zealand does, Australia does, South Africa does, but not the United States. We hope within 2 or 3 months we'll be promoting ourselves.

The President. Good. Now, that's the kind of leadership that Harry is showing.

Let me make one last point about airlines in particular. There are two things that we can really do to help improve the airline industry.

The first is on energy. Look, part of the reason that airlines are getting squeezed all the time is because their fuel costs are huge. That's the single biggest problem for most airlines, is fuel costs that skyrocket or are unpredictable.

And so if we've got a smart energy policy that is encouraging the use of electric cars and improving gas mileage and making sure that we're looking at alternative fuels like biofuels that can be used for trucks, and all those things will help to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and, as a consequence, will, over time, stabilize fuel prices in a way that is very helpful to the airlines.

The second thing that we need to do is we've got to upgrade our air traffic control system, which is a little creaky. And one of the—don't worry, I mean, it's safe to travel. I'm not—[laughter]—I don't want anybody to think, man, creaky, that doesn't sound good. [Laughter]

What it is, is that because we don't use the latest technologies, a lot of times the holding patterns for planes, how many planes can land safely at the same time, all those things are—reduce the efficiency of—the overall system is reduced because we're not using the best technologies available.

If we can upgrade those technologies, then we could reduce delays, we could reduce cancellations, we could reduce the amount of time that it takes when there's bad weather for planes to land. And all that would also help improve profitability in the airlines industry, which in turn would mean that they would be able to hire more workers and provide outstanding customer service. Okay?

All right. It's a gentleman's turn. This guy right here. He's a big guy, he stood up and—he stood up, I thought, man, that's a big guy; I bet-

ter call on him. [Laughter] Say you're big too; I agree. [Laughter] Don't worry, I'm not saying you're not big. [Laughter] All right, go ahead.

Energy/Climate Change

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. My name is Dr. Herve Mazzocco. I am originally from France, actually from Africa, moved to France, and now I'm here in America because I believe—I still believe that America is the country of the American Dream. And I came here—I'm a scientist, president of a renewable energy startup, and I came here because I really believe that America can become the first country for clean energy.

One of the comments I wanted to make, coming from Europe where carbon is regulated, I see firsthand—I have a company in France also—that regulation works. It creates jobs. My company has been growing 30 percent every year in France for the past 2 years, and I really want to see that happen here. And I think that even if you don't believe in climate change, there's, like, byproducts that are awesome jobs. The country is going to advance technology-wise. We're going to become once again like we were with the space industry, the most advanced—technologically—country in the world. And so I really want to see this regulations happen because it's going to help all of us in the clean energy business.

The President. Okay. Well, let me just talk about—this is—when the conservatives have their conventions and they yell at me and say how terrible I am—[laughter]—along with health care, this is the other thing that they usually point out, which is, is that, “The President wants to create this cap-and-trade system, and it's going to be a job killer, and it's one more step in the Government takeover of the American economy.” So this is a good place for me to maybe just spend a little time talking about energy and climate change.

First of all, we just got 5 feet of snow in Washington, and so everybody is like—a lot of the people who are opponents of climate change, they say, “See, look at that, there's all this snow on the ground; this doesn't mean anything.” I want to just be clear that the science of climate change doesn't mean that every place is

getting warmer; it means the planet as a whole is getting warmer. But what it may mean is, for example, Vancouver, which is supposed to be getting snow during the Olympics, suddenly is at 55 degrees, and Dallas suddenly is getting 7 inches of snow.

What—the idea is, is that as the planet as a whole gets warmer, you start seeing changing weather patterns, and that creates more violent storm systems, more unpredictable weather. So any single place might end up being warmer; another place might end up being a little bit cooler; there might end up being more precipitation in the air, more monsoons, more hurricanes, more tornadoes, more drought in some places, floods in other places.

So I just—that's one aspect of the science that I think everybody should understand. That's point number one.

Point number two: The best way for us to unleash the free market—the best way for us to unleash the free market and capitalism and innovation and dynamism in the energy sector is for us to fully take into account all the costs that go into producing energy and using energy.

And what do I mean by that? Look, if you tell a company that there are no mileage standards on cars, then people end up making Hummers. Right? And everybody drives Hummers until finally gas gets so crazy, and at a certain point, people start saying, maybe I should get a more fuel-efficient car.

But if you've got a fuel efficiency standard in place that says your car needs to get 20 miles a gallon or 30 miles a gallon, suddenly all these engineers are thinking, well, how do we do that? And all these companies start coming up with new technologies that make your cars more fuel efficient. Ultimately, you end up seeing jobs and businesses thriving in response to the regulation that's been put there.

Now, that's one way to regulate, is just to tell people you got to produce more energy-efficient cars. Another way of doing it is just to send a price signal. You say, it's going to be more expensive for you if you've got a less fuel-efficient car.

Well, that's the only idea that we're trying to talk about when it comes to these greenhouse

gases that are causing global warming. If we say that, you know what, the pollution that's being sent into the atmosphere has a cost to all of us—in terms of, in some cases, the air we breathe that's causing asthma, in some cases because it's causing climate change—we just want you to take into account those costs and price energy accordingly. And that means that things like wind energy suddenly become more appealing because they don't produce those pollution—those pollutants, and other sources of energy become less appealing because they do produce those pollutants.

The idea has been that if we put a price on these carbons, then maybe that would be a way that companies would all respond and start inventing new things that would make our planet cleaner. That's the whole idea.

Now, last point I'm going to make on this. What is true is that a lot of us depend on dirty sources of energy and a lot of us depend on really inefficient cars and buildings and et cetera. And so there's got to be a transition. We're not going to suddenly get all our energy from wind or all our energy from sun because we just don't have the technology to do it.

But what we should be doing is planning over the next 20, 30 years to move in that direction. That's what countries like China are doing. That's what countries like France are doing. That's what countries all across Europe are doing and all across Asia are doing. We don't want to be left behind. We're the only ones who have kind of missed the boat. So we're still using 20th-century technologies, and everybody else is producing 21st-century technologies.

Look what happened with the car. We started getting our clock cleaned when consumers decided they wanted a cleaner car, and suddenly everybody was buying their cars from Japan or now South Korea. And we wanted to make sure that that doesn't happen when it comes to wind turbines, it doesn't happen when it comes to solar energy, et cetera.

So the ideas that are being talked about is how do we provide more incentive for clean energy companies like yours to operate profitably, and over time, how do we start shifting away from less efficient ways of using energy?

That's a pretty straightforward thing to do. There's nothing radical about it.

It is true, though, that it's not going to happen overnight; it's going to take some time. And we're still going to be getting our electricity from coal. We're still going to be getting electricity from nuclear energy. We're still going to be getting electricity and power from natural gas and other traditional sources. We just want to make sure that we're also moving into the future even as we do so. And I think that we can. All right?

I think I've got time for one more question. All right, this is the last question. Last question. It's a lady's turn. All right, everybody is pointing at her. Right up there, yes, right there. I couldn't call on anybody. You know I love everybody here, but—

Education Reform

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. My name is Terri Wright, and I teach math right here at Green Valley High School.

The President. Excellent.

Q. And my mom is right behind you in the top row.

The President. Where is Mom? Mom, raise your hand.

Q. Right there.

The President. Oh, hey, Mom. [Laughter] You have a very young looking mom.

Q. Thank you. My question is this—and I'm speaking on behalf of all of us math teachers up here—when you were a freshman in high school, specifically, did you have math homework every night? And if you did, did you do it? [Laughter]

The President. Oh, wow. [Laughter] The answer is yes and sometimes. [Laughter] But first of all, let me thank you for being a math teacher, because we need more math teachers. We need more science teachers. We need more teachers generally who are enthusiastic about their work and their jobs. So thanks to all the teachers here. We love teachers.

All right. Now, we are actually—unfortunately, our students are falling behind in math and science internationally. We used to rank at the top, and now we're sort of in the middle of the

pack when it comes to math and science performance.

This is why one of the things that I've been emphasizing this year—and this actually hasn't been subject to a lot of controversy; this is an area where we've been able to get good cooperation between Democrats and Republicans—is promoting math and science education, promoting technology education. The more that we are moving our young people into these areas, the better off this economy is going to be, because that means we're producing engineers, we're producing scientists, we're producing computer programmers.

So we want to make sure that we are recruiting more math teachers, we're recruiting more science teachers. We want all outstanding teachers to be getting higher pay. We want to make sure that there's constant professional development when it comes to the teaching profession, so that if you had the best way of teaching math 5 years ago, it might not be the best way of teaching math 5 years from now, and so you should be able to go back and constantly sharpen your skills.

To the students, I want to say this: We're doing a lot of work on education reform. We are doing a lot to bring in new teachers, to improve classrooms, to make sure that they're all connected to the Internet, to make sure that college is more affordable. But let me just say that it won't make any difference if our students aren't working a little bit harder.

Now, I'm not saying all of you aren't working hard. I'm sure many of you feel like you are working very, very hard, because Malia and Sasha always tell me how hard they're working. [Laughter] But I really do think that we're going to have to emphasize in the next decade that we're competing around the world, and America will continue to be number one as long as we are just as hungry as other countries.

So if our kids are spending all their time playing video games and somebody else's kids are getting the math and science skills to invent video games—[laughter]—we're not going to be number one. I mean, it's as simple as that.

So the need to turn off the TV, put the video games away, buckle down on your work, making sure that parents are checking their kids' home-

work and talking to their teachers—being accountable, being responsible—that’s what’s going to make sure that we continue to thrive, we continue to excel into the future.

Thank you, Henderson. I had a great time. Bye-bye.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:58 a.m. at Green Valley High School. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of State Ross Miller, State Senate Majority Leader Steven A. Hors-

ford, and Gov. James A. Gibbons of Nevada; Tina R. Long, electrician, Bombard Electric; Gregory Koehler, firefighter and paramedic, North Las Vegas Fire Department; Edward E. Whitacre, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer, General Motors Company; and Warren E. Buffett, chief executive officer and chairman, Berkshire Hathaway Inc. A participant referred to former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan.

Remarks to the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority in Las Vegas, Nevada *February 19, 2010*

Hello, everybody. Thank you. Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you very much.

Well, what a extraordinary introduction from an extraordinary leader. I just want to reiterate something I said at the town hall meeting earlier. You could not have a better fighter on behalf of the people of Nevada than Senator Harry Reid. And I am just proud—I’m proud to call him a friend.

Now, a lot of people in Washington forget where they come from; Harry Reid has not. And that’s something that I’ve always admired about Harry, ever since I first got to the Senate. He retains that honesty and decency and homespun good sense and, yes, sometimes some bluntness that he’s carried with him since his boyhood in Searchlight.

We’ve got a number of other special guests that I just want to acknowledge. First of all, I want to thank Jim for helping to organize this. Thank you so much to Jim Murren. I want to acknowledge Congresswoman Shelley Berkley and Congresswoman Dina Titus, who are here. Assemblyman Joe Hogan is here and State Senator David Parks. I want to thank the Las Vegas Asian, Henderson, Latin, North Las Vegas, and Urban Chambers. Thank you, guys, for helping to organize this—and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

You know, I was mentioning the fact that Harry has retained that sense of who he is, despite the extraordinary journey that he’s traveled. Over the past year, under very trying cir-

cumstances for the country, I’ve seen something else in Harry. Harry comes across as soft-spoken, but he’s made of very strong stuff. He’s never been afraid to make tough decisions—even if they weren’t politically popular—if they were the right decisions for his State and the right decisions for America.

And so I just want to reiterate, his leadership has made a tremendous difference, and through these economic storms, he’s never lost sight of the struggles and the hardships of the people who sent him to Washington. And every Nevadan should know the strength and the character of a man that I hope and expect to serve in Washington for many years to come.

So thank you, Harry, for the great work you do. Harry also gets embarrassed when you compliment him too much. You know, he kind of—[laughter]—see, he looks away. [Laughter]

Now, before I go any further, let me set the record straight: I love Vegas! [Applause] There you go. Always have. Love Vegas. [Laughter] Enjoy myself every time I’ve gotten an opportunity to visit. In fact, just last night, I drew a flush on the river and cut the budget deficit in half. [Laughter] Some of you know I can play some poker. [Laughter]

Now, I did receive a little bit of heat, I know, from maybe some in this room, when I said that folks shouldn’t blow their college savings in Vegas. That doesn’t mean I doesn’t love Vegas. It wasn’t meant to be a shot. I think everybody here would agree that the only place